

74 15

The RESURRECTION of CHRIST
prov'd, and vindicated, against the
most Important Objections of the An-
tient Jews, or Modern Deists; and
his Disciples shewn to be sufficient
Witnesses of the Fact.

A 693. C

SERMON

P R E A C H ' D at

TROWBRIDGE,

I N T H E

C O U N T Y o f W I L T S :

W I T H

Some Additions and Amendments.

By JAMES FOSTER.

R O M . I . 4 .

And declared to be the Son of God with power,
according to the spirit of holiness, by the Re-
surrection from the Dead.

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN CLARK, at the Bible and
Crown in the Poultry, near Cheapside, 1720.

Price Four Pence

H

R
M
Pe
an
de
co
its
nu
of



Acts X. 40, 41.

Him God rais'd up the third day, and shew'd him openly : not to all the People, but unto Witnesses, chosen before of God.



S the Christian Institution has all the necessary inherent Characters and essential Marks of a Religion coming from God, its Doctrines being perfectly agreeable to all the Moral Perfections of the Divine Nature, and to the highest

Reason, and its Precepts the most friendly to Mankind, exactly calculated to promote the Peace and Happiness both of particular Persons, and of civil Societies : So is the External Evidence for its Truth, and Divinity, sufficient to convince every honest, unprejudic'd Mind. For its sacred Author was attended with constant, and numerous Demonstrations of the mighty Power of God, working Wonders by him, for the Confirmation

A SERMON

firmation of his Mission, and Doctrine; I say with constant, and numerous Demonstrations of the mighty Power of God, because such useful, and benevolent Miracles as his were, must have proceeded from the Fountain of Goodness, and can't, without the most extreme Repugnancy to the Nature of Things, be attributed to the Operation of Evil Spirits. And moreover, God not only bare Witness to him by Signs and Wonders, divers and eminent Miracles, all along from the beginning to the end of his Ministry, but likewise set to his Seal that he sent him, by not suffering him to be holden by the strong Bands of Death, or Powers of the Grave, but restoring his Body to Life on the third Day, which is such a noble and triumphant Proof of the Excellence and divine Authority of our holy Religion, as will for ever confound Infidelity, and baffle its strongest Attempts against it. And therefore it well deserves our Care to establish this great Truth, especially since 'tis withal a prime, fundamental Article of our Christian Faith, upon which it all rests; for if that Person whom we now acknowledge as our Master and Lord, did not rise from the Dead, he must have been really (what the Jews blasphemously styl'd him) a false Prophet, and a deceiver of the People. In discoursing upon the Words which I have read to you, I shall,

First, SHEW, that Christ rose from the Dead on the third Day, and was seen afterwards by certain of his Followers, whom God had chosen to be the Witnesses of his Resurrection.

Secondly,

Secondly, THAT his Appearance after his Resurrection only to some chosen Witnesses, and not to the Rulers of the Jewish Nation, or the whole Body of the People, was a Method of proceeding perfectly consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of Divine Providence.

BUT before I enter upon the Prosecution of my main Argument, it may not be amiss to enquire, Why God is here said to have rais'd up Christ, when in another Place he tells the Jews he should raise up himself : *Destroy this Temple, and in three Days I will raise it up,* John ii. 19. meaning *the Temple of his Body*, ver. 21. And the true Reason of it is, Because he neither did, nor could have done it but by a Divine Commission, and a Derivation of Power from the Almighty. This Account of the Matter he himself directs us to, *John x. 18. No Man taketh it [my Life] from me, but I lay it down of myself : I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again : this Commandment have I received of my Father.* And this is no other than a common Form of Speech, especially in the sacred Writings, where that is frequently attributed to the Principals, which was done by others under their Command and Direction. Thus the Baptism of the Disciples is imputed to Christ as his Act, because they perform'd it in his Name, and by his Authority. * And God himself is said to have utter'd the Law at Mount Sinai, *Exod. xx. 1.* Tho' our Saviour tells us in plain Terms, That no Man had heard his voice at any

* Compare *John iii. 22.* with *Chap. iv. 1, 2.*
time,

time, John v. 37. And the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews expressly styles it, *the Word spoken by Angels*, Heb. ii. 2. This premis'd, I proceed to my

First Head of Discourse, viz. To show that Christ rose from the Dead on the third Day, and was seen afterwards by certain of his Followers, whom God had chosen to be the Witnesses of his Resurrection. And,

First, Either the Body remain'd in the Grave, or was taken thence by his Disciples, or by some of the Unbelieving Jews, or Gentiles, or else he rose from the Dead. Now that the Body did not still remain in the Grave, is evident, because then by a bare producing it the Jews might have disprov'd the Apostles Relation, and have expos'd the Cheat to the World; and doubtless they would have done it had they been able to justify their own Proceedings in putting him to Death, and clear themselves from the Charge of having shed innocent Blood, even the Blood of the Mef-sias their King, as he must have been, had this great Event really happen'd according to his Prediction. And they did in effect acknowledge, by the Methods which they took, that his Resurrection would have been an undeniable Proof of his Divine Mission, and consequently of his being the Son of God; for had they not been thus persuaded, they would never have had recourse to that vile, scandalous Refuge, which cannot but expose them to all the sober thinking Part of Mankind, *viz.* That his Disciple stole him away while the Guard was asleep. Now that this was given out by the Chief Priests, and the then Powerful at Jerusalem, and was not a false Story in-

invented by the Apostles, is plain ; For how could such a notorious Forgery, as this must have been, be publish'd but a few Years after the Fact, in the Face of the whole *Jewish* Nation, when there must have been Multitudes alive who were able to confute it, and prove it an Imposture, and they not be detected, and have their Villany laid open before the World ? And if this had been done, must it not have issued in the utter Confusion of the Christian Sect, then easily to be crush'd, because in its tender Infant State ? Or at least, is it not impossible but we must have heard something of it ? Would it not have been objected against Christianity by its ancient Enemies, who were some of 'em Men of vast Learning, very well acquainted with all Events of any Importance relating to it, and with every remarkable Revolution it past through, and were unquestionably too malicious, to let such a signal Transaction as this would have been, pass without close and critical Remarks upon it to its disadvantage, and to the very great retarding the Course of its Conquests ?

But let us a little consider the Evasion itself. And it happens well for us, that as we have it upon Record, 'tis a thing in its own Nature incapable of any rational Proof, because the Soldiers who were confessedly asleep all the while, are the only Vouchers for the Story : And I think we give as much to the Testimony as it deserves, if we allow it to be a Dream, which it must be own'd, is a goodly Foundation for one of the most specious Objections against Christianity ; for I hope to make it appear to be as idle, and improbable, as the most Romantick of all our Night-Visions, what no one can believe any thing

thing of, who is in the least acquainted with the necessary Workings of humane Passions. For can we imagine that the Apostles would have ventured their Lives to carry on what they knew to be an Imposture? Is it not more reasonable to think, that if they had been persuaded that *Jesus* was a Deceiver, they would have expos'd him with the rest of the Countrymen, than have endeavour'd to palliate a Deceit, upon the account of which they suffer'd so many Inconveniences and Hardships? The Impostor had made 'em forsake their all in this World to follow him, which had render'd 'em contemptible in the Eyes of the *Jewisb* Nation, brought on 'em the Hatred and Displeasure of their Relations, and rowz'd the Vengeance both of the Civil, and Ecclesiastical Powers against 'em, and therefore 'tis much more supposable that this would have exasperated their Spirits against him, and have made them join with others in branding his Memory, than that they would undertake so dangerous a Task to keep up his credit as the great Prophet of God, who under the pretence and colour of Friendship had ruin'd them, and so had shown himself to have had no regard to the most sacred, and inviolable Tyes of Honour, or Justice; and when they knew that the *Jews* would make diligent search after the Body, and possibly might find it; and that the Consequence of that could be nothing less than an infamous, and terrible Death to them, as pretending to be the *Messias* had been to their Leader. It will appear much more incredible that the Apostles should attempt so hazardous an Undertaking, if we consider that they were not naturally bold enterprizing Men, of undaunted Resolution, and immovable Constancy of Soul, as they must have

preach'd at Trowbridge. 9

have been, before they could have ventured upon what carried in it so much Difficulty, and Danger, but their Spirits were low, and abject, suited to the original, mean, and vulgar Employment, and to that despicable Condition of Life in which they had been train'd up from their Youth. They all basely deserted their Master when he was apprehended, tho' then they had great Hopes of Preferment from him, and of being leading Men in that glorious Kingdom, which they thought he was about to erect ; and can we suppose, that when these Hopes of theirs were dash'd, they would have essay'd to take away his dead Body which was guarded by Soldiers, when there was the utmost Risque run of their perishing in the Attempt ? But granting them to have been so abandon'd of Reason, and so amazingly hardned against the Fears of the most dreadful Evils of this Life and the Life to come, as to undertake this : Is it possible that all the Watch, Sixty two in Number, should have been asleep, and so have been unable to frustrate the Design ? 'Twas not usual for 'em to sleep altogether when they were on their ordinary Stations, and 'tis absolutely incredible that any of them should give way to Drowsiness upon such an important, and extraordinary Occasion, when they were waiting to see the Determination of as remarkable a Scene, as ever had been opened within the Memory of Man. But not to press our Adversaries too hard, we will make another favourable Supposition, and that is, that the Guard were all asleep, certainly the breaking the Seal, and the rolling away the Stone must have awakened some of 'em, especially if we suppose, (which is a very natural and obvious Thought,) that some of them lay, or sat against the Stone. For that was the only

10 A SERMON

way they could come at the Body, because the Sepulchre was hewn out of a new Rock, and so there could be no secret Avenues, or Passages into it. And 'tis scarce possible but that the Apostles should do a great many incautious Things, by reason of the Hurry, and Confusion they must be in, if we allow them to be of the most obstinate, inflexible Tempers, which would have rouz'd the Watch out of their broken disorder'd Sleep, and have utterly confounded their Schemes. And finally, I appeal to any reasonable Man, Whether the Whole looks like the Action of timorous Men, who had had those few Spirits which were in 'em broken but a day or two before, by that ignominious Punishment which was inflicted upon their Master, and must therefore be suppos'd to have been in haste to carry away the Body. Is it not the most absurd and ridiculous Thing in Nature to think, that such Persons would tarry to pull off the grave Cloths, which would require a considerable Time † to lay the Napkin which was about his Head in one place, and the Linnen Clothes in another? And as I have proved, with relation to the Disciples of our Lord, that the Supposition of their stealing his Body out of the Grave is repugnant to the obvious Nature and Reason of Things; so I believe it will be allow'd me, to be to the last degree improbable, that any of the Unbelieving Jews, or

† These grave Clothes (as Dr. *Nichols* observes) were a sort of Fascice, or thin Slips of Linnen, which were roll'd round the Body; so that about a dead Body there might be many Score Yards of Filleting; which being bound over those viscous Bal'ams they us'd, would stick fast, and 'twould be a long Work to unrole 'em. *Conf.* with a *Theif*.

Gentiles,

preach'd at Trowbridge. 11

Gentiles, should attempt it; for doubtless they wish'd it might remain secure in the Grave, that so they might be justified in their Infidelity, in their obstinate refusing to receive that Light he brought from Heaven, and in their inveterate, and implacable Enmity against his Religion.

AND now from what has been offer'd under this Head, there results (I think) an undeniable, uncontestable Proof of the Truth of Christ's Resurrection. For 'tis evident that he was really dead, both from the general Consent of Antiquity, and from what he suffer'd before he was led to be crucified, and upon the Cross, which was enough to kill a Man of the most vigorous, and hardy Make. 'Tis granted on all Hands that he was buried, and it cannot be denied, but that there was a Guard set to watch the Sepulchre; and since I have shown it to be upon that account incredible, that any one steal away the Body, as also to be utterly improbable, it should have remain'd in the Grave; because then, when his Disciples reported he was risen, it would have been expos'd to the View of the People, as a clear and unanswerable Confutation of that Falshood, which 'tis not so much as pretended was ever done, he must have risen on the third Day, according to his Prediction.

Secondly, OUR Lord was seen after he rose from the Dead, by certain of his Followers, whom God had chosen to be the Witnesses of his Resurrection. This they all of 'em testified to the World, and their Testimony had all those Circumstances attending it, which are requisite to render any Testimony credible. For,

First, THEIR whole Conduct proves 'em to have been honest, undesigning Men. Had they been Men of Design, whose main End it was to carry on a carnal secular Interest, they would have comply'd in all Cases, as far as was consistent with their obtaining that End, with the Humours and Prejudices of those amongst whom they endeavour'd to spread their Imposture, they would have indulg'd 'em in some of their darling Sentiments, and have sooth'd and flatter'd their most agreeable Vices. For they must have known, had they at all consider'd Things, that nothing was so likely to promote the ready, and universal Reception of that Religion, they intended to propagate, as the making it favour the most important Opinions and Usages of other Religions, and the corrupt, and sensual Inclinations of humane Nature. And accordingly there was nothing more friendly to the spreading the *Mahometan* Imposture, than its being a Medley of Judaism, Christianity, and the *Arabian* Superstition, and its being fram'd upon Principles of Sense, and brutal Pleasure *. And undoubtedly had the Disciples of Christ been as this wicked Impostor, they would have play'd the same Game as he did; whereas their whole Management was quite the Reverse of his. Tho' the Philosophers and Wise Men amongst the *Greeks* were mighty Admirers of, and much us'd to Oratory, to rhetorical Ornaments and Embellishments of Speech, and perhaps would despise the Christian Doctrine upon the account of the Homeliness of the Language, and the Familiarity, and

* See *Prideaux's Life of Mahom.*

on ACTS X. 40, 41. 13

Plainness of the Style in which it was deliver'd; tho' they were us'd to, and consequently were fond of a nice, and exact way of Reasoning, and so might be tempted to undervalue the Apostle's Preaching, because they propos'd their Duty to 'em nakedly, neglecting humane Learning, and Argumentation, and a Deduction of it from first Principles, by a long elaborate Train of Consequences: Yet their Preaching to 'em was not with *Excellence or Speech, or the enticing Words of Mens Wisdom*, as it would certainly have been, had they been acted, and govern'd by carnal Views. For I hope it will be own'd, that St. Paul, at least, who in these polite Countries might have been the Mouth of his Companions, was a Scholar, and a Gentleman, and so capable of Elegance both of Thought and Language, and of recommending himself to the nicest, and most critical Taste. They would not to gratify the Humours of a few Philosophers, tho' the gaining 'em to their Party might have been of vast Use to them afterwards, thwart the great End and Design of their Preaching, which was general Edification and Improvement, the Improvement of the poor inferior Part of Mankind, as well as of the Learned and Noble. They knew that what the celebrated Sages amongst the Heathen, call'd Rational Knowledge, was much of it but *Science falsely so call'd*; and that since Miracles were a shorter, and easier way of convincing the Vulgar of their Duty, they might very well omit all such deep Disquisitions, learned Niceties, and obscure Speculations, as they oftentimes us'd in the Lectures, and Writings about Morality.

AND as they scorn'd a base Compliance with the Humours, so neither did they yield any thing
to

to the Prejudices of the World ; but the principal Subject of their Discourses was the Crucifixion of him, whom they preach'd as the Christ, tho' that Doctrine was a Stumbling-block to the Jews, as being contrary to a Tradition prevalent amongst them, of an External pompous Reign of the Messias ; and tho' the Notion of a crucified Redeemer of the World, and of a mortal God, to whom all the Nations of the Earth must do Homage, and be in Subjection, did appear foolish and extravagant to the Greeks.

FURTHER, The Doctrines they deliver'd were contrary, many of 'em, to the pre-conceiv'd Opinions of all Mankind, and to their most sacred, and venerable Customs. They discharg'd their Followers from an Observation of the Ceremonial Law of *Moses*, which the Jews had a strange Fondness for, and a mighty Estimation of, and represented the Observances of it under the most low and despicable Images, and represented the *Gentiles* as standing upon an equal Foot with the Jews, with relation to the Favour of God, whom they had always look'd upon as hated and reprobated by him. Then they made the numerical individual Unity of the Godhead a fundamental Article of their Religion, in opposition to the Polytheism of the Heathen, and abolish'd all those Fopperies, idolatrous and superstitious Usages which Custom had establish'd as necessary Parts of their Religious Worship. The Rules of Life which they laid down to be observ'd by their Followers, were directly contrary to the universal Bent of unsanctified Nature, and reach'd not only to the total Regulation of the outward Conversation, but to the Thoughts and Affections of the Mind. They were so far from favouring

Liber-

Libertinism, and feeding Debauchery and Vice, that they requir'd a Heart wean'd from the Love of all sensual Pleasures and earthly Enjoyments. And finally, the Reward which they propos'd for Virtue and Goodness in the future World was a Paradice, not such as *Mahomet's*, abounding with animal Delights, but with refin'd and spiritual Joys, which none will be capable of relishing, but the Men who brighten and improve their rational Natures, and carefully rule and moderate their bodily Appetites. You see then that the Persons on whose Testimony we rely for the Truth of our Lord's Resurrection, were act'd throughout their whole Management by Principles of Honour, and Conscience, that they could not aim at raising themselves a great Name, or promoting their Temporal Interest, because they run Counter to the whole World, scorn'd all those mean Arts of addressing to the Passions, and insinuating themselves into the Affections of Men, which all that prosecute such low Ends must have recourse to, and insisted upon a constant Discharge of those Duties which are contrary to the strongest and most impetuous Inclinations of the Soul of Man.

AGAIN, 'Tis plain that they were humble mortified Men, and that they did not greedily hunt after Fame and Honour, because some of them refus'd the greatest that could be offer'd 'em, even that of being deified †, because they could not accept it with a good Conscience. And the Plainness and Simplicity which they use in rating their own Faults and Miscarriages, is a

† Acts xiv. 13, 14.

clear

clear Evidence to me that they were not desirous of advancing themselves by any indirect Methods, but that they were honest and impartial Men. And consequently, their Testimony is to be credited about any thing, of which they were competent Judges : And therefore,

Secondly, As they were too honest to deceive others, so they testified of a Matter in which they could not be deceiv'd themselves, and of which they were as fit to judge as Men of the greatest Learning, and the most refin'd humane Wisdom. Their Testimony was about somewhat, which was the Object of their Senses ; viz. That they saw Jesus of Nazareth after his Resurrection, and had frequent Conversation with him during the Space of forty Days. And what was there in this which requir'd any degree of Learning, or uncommon Penetration, and which was above the Capacities of Men of ordinary Occupations ? But perhaps it may be said, that the Thoughts of the Glory which the Disciples imagin'd they should be possess'd of, might turn their Brains, or else they being Men of weak Heads and credulous Tempers, and so inclin'd to Enthusiasm ; and being big with an Expectation of his raising again, might imagine they saw him, and heard him talk with them when there was nothing real in the Case. Well ! Let us see whether this wont hold with as much Strength against the Testimony of any wise intelligent Persons, as it does against that of the Disciples. And I believe it will be granted me, that Men of good Sense, and of a liberal generous Education, are generally capable of stronger Impressions from an Expectation of Glory and Honour, than those who are accustom'd to a low vulgar way of Thinking, and

preach'd at Trowbridge. 17

and whose Spirits are depress'd by a servile mercenary Course of Life ; so that there is nothing in the first Part of the Objection. And might I not with as much, or more, Reason have affirm'd, had Christ appear'd to a Company of Philosophers ; that they were a Pack of wild Enthusiasts, who had craz'd themselves by hard Study, and therefore were not to be credited. But further, I am mistaken if this Argument be of any Force, if it has not a Tendency to make us turn the worst Sort of Scepticks, even to distrust and disbelieve our **O W N** Senses, and consequently if it be not a very mad and extravagant Way of Reasoning. For upon the same Account that the Disciples are charg'd with Enthusiasm, we may be all of us rank Enthusiasts in thinking we really see and converse with our Friends, whom we have for some time expected a Visit from, and the Prospect of enjoying whose Company has pleas'd and charm'd our Imaginations, when the Whole is only a visionary Scene, nothing else but the Workings of a hot and vigorous Fancy.

AND tho' this be sufficient to expose the Vanity and Enthusiasm of this Cavil ; yet since it is the only Thing that remains to be urg'd against the Testimony of these Witnesses, I shall show the Unreasonableness of it further from the Nature and Circumstances of the Fact. And first, 'tis plain, that they were not Men of craz'd, bewilder'd Understandings, but Persons of calm, sober, and rational Thought, from the Excellent Discourses of Morality which they wrote, which vastly exceed all the fine Sayings of the antient *Pagan* Moralists, which our Modern *Deists* so mightily admire.

FURTHER, Their Master's Appearance to them was not quick and transient as a Flash of Lightning, (for if he had just skim'd along before their Eyes, and not afforded them a perfect View, I should have been inclin'd too to think it a Delusion, and that their Imaginations were distemper'd,) but he tarry'd with them a considerable Time, and eat and drank in their Presence; and if all this were only in a Dream, 'tis impossible for any of us to prove we were ever awake. I shall only add under this Head, to strengthen and corroborate the Apostles Testimony, what St. Paul says, viz. *That he was seen of above five hundred Brethren at once**, the great Part of whom were alive when he wrote this †, and so could have confuted it had it been false, and to make all these a distracted Company, is what I am sure the polite and ingenious Part of the World must be ashamed of. I have prov'd then that the Apostles of our Lord could not themselves be imposed upon in what they testified to the World concerning his Resurrection, and that they were Persons of Honour and Integrity, and so could not endeavour to deceive others; a necessary Consequence of which is, that the Fact must have happen'd just as they reported it. There is one weighty Circumstance behind which very much confirms the Truth of their Testimony, since there can be no arguing against it, but what is arguing against all the tender sensible Passions of humane Nature. Which is,

* 1 Cor. xv. 6.

+ Ibid.

preach'd at Trowbridge. 19

IN the *Third Place*, That they neither did nor could get any Thing by attesting our Lord's Resurrection, but most of them suffer'd Death for it, and seal'd the Truth of it with their Blood. They were sure to draw all the Hatred and Vengeance of the *Jews* upon them ; and if they should turn to the *Gentiles* the Doctrine of a crucified Malefactor (as they would represent it) rising from the Dead, would never go down with their Philosophers and Wise Men, and they themselves would be so far from being promoted, that they would be look'd upon as out of their Senses ; especially they could never expect to be cordially receiv'd any where, when (as I have already shewn) they brought a Doctrine with them which overturn'd *Pagan Idolatry*, and destroy'd the fundamental Principles of *Judaism* as distinct from Natural Religion, and enjoin'd strict Regularity of Thought and Life in an Age wherein Religion, amongst the *Jews*, was degenerated into Form and Shew, and the *Gentiles* had almost wholly defac'd the Reason of their Minds, and lost all Notion of the essential Difference between Good and Evil. And the Event answer'd accordingly, for they all of them underwent Tortures of all Kinds, and suffer'd Death in all its Forms of Terror for owning and publishing the Christian Faith, and the Resurrection of *Jesus*, as the Foundation of it.

AND now is it supposable that Men but of common Sense would invent an impudent Falsehood, and endeavour to impose it upon the World when they could have no Prospect of getting any Thing thereby, and when the best Treatment they could expect was that of Madfolks, *viz.*

close Confinement, and a low Diet for the Recovery of their Reason; but when 'twas more probable, they would meet with Universal Contempt and Hatred, be punish'd as Disturbers of the Peace of the World every-where, that if they apply'd themselves to their own Countrymen, they would die the Death of False Prophets, speaking Lyes in the Name of the Lord, and of impious Innovators in Religion if they turn'd to the *Gentiles*? Is it possible that so many should die to attest a Falshood? Had they been *Atheists*, they would never have done, but would have made their Lives as long, and pleasant, and comfortable as they could, and not have run themselves upon the most inconsiderable Inconveniences for nothing; and had they believ'd the Existence of a God, and of a Future State, of awful Rewards and Punishments, they would never have seal'd a Falshood with their Blood, nor have attested it with their last Breath, without the least visible Concern or Remorse of Conscience: Besides, 'tis almost a general Case for Men, who will vouch for a Lye with a great deal of Impudence while they are free and at ease when they come to suffer for it, to shrink and confess the Imposture: And can we think that these Men alone, of almost all Mankind, every one of them meet Death with a good Grace to defend and maintain what they knew to be false, should quench that Desire of Life, and root out of their Natures that backwardness to Death which is common to all Men? Or that those who had not half that Hardiness of Mind, or Resolution to encounter Sufferings which some others have, and whose Courage had before meanly fail'd 'em at the fancied Approach of a distant Danger in the Defence of what they thought to be true, should all of 'em undauntedly

edly suffer the most terrible Calamity, and Death itself to assert the Truth of what they were persuad'd was false? I think, whoever can believe these Things, must be allow'd to have rais'd his Faith above Reason, and ought never to except against believing Mysteries: For it seems impossible to me that any one should believe them who is convinc'd that there is a difference between Pleasure and Pain, and that the wise Creator has made a Desire of Happiness, and an Aversion to Misery, the strongest Passions, the leading and determining Affections of humane Souls. I proceed,

In the *Second Place*, to shew, That the Appearance of Christ after his Resurrection only to some chosen Witnesses, and not to the Rulers of the *Jewish* Nation, or the whole Body of the People, was a Method of proceeding perfectly consistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of Divine Providence. And here I can't help observing how hard 'tis for us to say of any of the Divine Proceedings, that they are inconsistent with infinite Goodness, or with a righteous and wise Disposition of Things; which 'tis impossible but the Ways of infinite Wisdom must have innumerable Mysteries in them which must puzzle humane Reason, and be incomprehensible by our finite Understandings. For if we understand scarce any thing of the Nature and Manner of working of the Things round about us, how can we expect that there should be nothing in the Purposes and Providential Acts of God but what we must see the Reason of, tho' *his Thoughts and Ways* can't but be infinitely farther above ours, than *the Heavens are above the Earth*? May not a Being of immense unfashionable Wisdom

dom have infinite Ends in view which we can know nothing of? Which is a Thought that should put us upon humbly admiring and adoring what the present narrow limited Condition of humane Nature wont suffer us to comprehend. Besides, we may often see but part of a Scheme which God is pursuing the Completion of it, perhaps being not to be till many hundred Years after our decease. For 'tis doubtless a common Method with him to bring about a great Event Step by Step, that it may be done in a way consistent with the Reason and free Agency of Mankind, and then no wonder that it appear like a broken Prospect, rude and confus'd: Whereas could we see the whole Chain of Causes and Effects working towards some wonderful Scene of Providence entire, we should be so far from taking upon us to censure the incomprehensible Acts of our Maker, that we should abhor ourselves in Dust and Ashes for having entertain'd irreverent and unworthy Thoughts of any of them, and should confess even *the Foolishness of God to be wiser than Men.* To apply this to the present Case, since I have shown it to be Fact that Christ did rise from the Dead, and appear only to a select Company of Men, should not the Consideration of the boundless Wisdom of the supreme Governour of the World silence all Objections which may arise in our Minds upon that account, either against his Providence, or against the Fact, even tho' we could not see how it was consistent with his Goodness or rectoral Wisdom. But I have these two Considerations to offer to show how it harmonizes with his perfect Goodness and wisest Government of the World.

First,

First, The Jews, by rejecting the Evidence which Christ himself, while he liv'd amongst them, gave them of the Truth of his Mission, and the Divinity of his Doctrine, had deserv'd to be no further treated with; and consequently neither the Wisdom nor Goodness of God could oblige him to do any thing extraordinary for their Conviction.

Secondly, If Christ had shown himself openly to the Rulers of the Jewish Nation, or to the Body of the People, 'tis probable that not many more would have been brought to believe in him by it than have been, and are by the present Evidence of the Truth of his Resurrection.

First, The Jews, by rejecting the Evidence which Christ himself gave 'em, while he liv'd amongst them, of the Truth of his Mission, and the Divinity of his Doctrine, had deserv'd to be no farther treated with; and consequently neither the Wisdom nor Goodness of God could oblige him to do any thing extraordinary for their Conviction. The Miracles which he wrought amongst them were numerous, great, and beneficial to Mankind; they were not done in Corners, but in the open Country, before vast Multitudes of People, who could easily have discern'd whether they were real, or only Juggle and Illusion. Then the Doctrines which his great and wonderful Works were an Attestation to the Truth of, they might soon have found, had they carefully examin'd 'em, to have been agreeable to the Perfections of God, and the Predictions of their own Prophets, calculated to promote solid Virtue and true Holiness, and to destroy

destroy the Devil's Tyranny over the Souls of Men. And yet they hated and persecuted him, tho' their Forefathers, whose Conduct they approv'd, had own'd the Authority of the antient Prophets upon their working but two or three Miracles. Further, they had many of them been baptiz'd by him, who reveal'd himself under the Denomination of the Fore-runner of the Messias*; and had, by submitting to his Baptism, acknowledg'd him to be a Prophet: And yet, tho' he declar'd *Jesus* to be the Christ †, they degraded his Mission, Doctrine and Miracles, attributing them to the Agency of the Devil ||, and after many barbarous and inhumane Insults offer'd him, while he minister'd for their Good, to compleat the Measure of their Iniquity, devoted him to an infamous and cruel Death; and when *Pilate* would have releas'd him ‡, preferr'd a Murtherer before him |||. And were not these vast Affronts offer'd to God, whose Minister he was? Might he not have immediately visited, and horribly plagued them for these Things? 'Twould certainly have been agreeable to the nicest Rules of Equity, if the Almighty had then brought upon them universal Desolation, and turn'd their pleasant Land into a wild and frightful Desart; or if he had commanded that the Gospel of his Son should never more have been offer'd to them. Certainly then he could not be oblig'd to make use of such Methods to remove their Infidelity, as was vastly beyond what was sufficient and strictly necessary to convince Men

* John i. 23. † Ver. 29, 30. || Matt. xii. 24.

‡ Mark xv. 9, 12. ||| Matt. xxvii. 21, 22, 23.

of tolerably sober and impartial Reflections, and to conquer any Prejudices but what were obstinate and inflexible ; nor was it, I think, consistent with his Wisdom so to do. For had he continued to afford 'em more Light in proportion to their shutting their Eyes against it, he would have given Encouragement to the rest of his Subjects to despise the Manifestations of his Grace, and slight the Authority of his Providence, and so have sapp'd the Foundations of his own Government.

Secondly, If Christ had shown himself openly to the Rulers of the *Jewish* Nation, or to the Body of the People, 'tis probable that not many more would have been brought to believe in him by it than have been, and are by the present Evidence of the Truth of his Resurrection. Let us suppose he had appear'd to the Chief Priests and Rulers, what may we think would have been the Event of it ? Would it have issud in their hearty Conversion to Christianity ? We have all imaginable Reason to believe the contrary. For the Soldiers, whom they knew not to be of his Party, had told 'em that he was risen, and yet they continued to blacken his Memory as an Impostor, and persisted in the Spite and Malice against, and virulent Hatred of his Disciples : And therefore, 'tis probable, that tho' his Appearance might have made some awful Impression upon 'em at first, they would soon have worn it off, and either have contented themselves with thinking it a Delusion ; or if he had repeated his Visits, would have endeavour'd to seize and bind him that they might put him to a second Death : For so abandon'd were they of the Fear of God, and of all religious Reverence for his wond'rous

D

Works,

Works, as to hold a Consultation about taking away the Life of *Lazarus*, after it had been miraculously restor'd to him! Their Consciences were so dead and stupid, and their Prejudices against our Blessed Lord, so stout and invincible, that (I believe) they would never have confess'd him to be the Christ, if he had not continually haunted them, breathing Fire, and Vengeance, and scattering Plagues, and Death, which a Deist would condemn, as Persecution, and a great Hindrance to Freethinking.

But what if he had appear'd to the common People, might he not have been better receiv'd by them? Suppose it, yet there could be no End answer'd by it, which might not as well have been obtain'd another Way; for the only Thing, in it which could have induc'd them to believe in him, was its being a Miracle. Wherefore they might as well have been convinc'd by the Report of the Disciples, that he was risen, and by their confirming their Testimony by a long Train and Series of Miracles, and some of the same Nature with this, *viz.* restoring dead Persons to Life *. Further, heathen Nations could have had the Report of his having appear'd to such vast Multitudes only from a few, and would undoubtedly never have believed, if they had had nothing to depend upon, but their single Authority; so that it would not have weigh'd so much with them, as the Testimony but of one or two Men, who could establish the Credit of it by Miracles. And as it is reasonable

* *Act*s ix. 40. 41. Chap. xx. 9, 11.

to think, that in the first Ages of Christianity, it would not have encreas'd the Number of its Professors, much abv'e what it really was, had Christ shewn himself openly in the Land of *Judea*, after his Resurrection; so neither would it (I think) have very much enlarg'd its Conquests in succeeding Ages. For the Proofs of the Fact, as we now have them, are so clear and numerous, as that they won't fail of convincing every one who considers them with an honest, unbias'd Mind; and the greatest possible Evidence the Thing is now capable of, can do no more: both would infallibly gain the Assent of every inquisitive impartial Man, and neither in the least Influence where the Understanding is blinded by Passion, or the Heart possess'd by a strong and violent Prejudice: And certainly it can be no Reflection upon the Wisdom of God not to have suffer'd that, which was unlikely to answer any very great or important End. I shall conclude this Discourse with two or three Inferences.

And *First*, THE Resurrection of Christ is a strong Argument for the Truth of the christian Religion. For while he was upon Earth fulfilling his Ministry he appear'd to his Resurrection as a future Proof of the Truth of his prophetick Mission and Authority, and of the Divinity of his Doctrine †. But now, if what he propos'd to the World, as the Doctrine of God, had been but a Forgery and Invention of his own, can we imagine that God would ever have rais'd him from the dead, and so have set his Seal to

† Mat'. xii. 39. 40.

a Lye, and have given publick Attestation to a Falshood? For it must have been God's Act to unite his Soul and Body again, or at least, which makes him equally accountable for it, it could not have been done, as the Circumstances of Things were, but by his direct Ordination and Appointment; for no good Spirits would have done it, unless they had had the Command of their Creator and Sovereign; nor evil Spirits to establish the Belief of a Doctrine, which is agreeable to the Nature and Perfections of God, and tends to overturn the Kingdom of Darkness by acquainting Mankind with all the glorious Attributes of the divine Nature, with their Duty in its largest Extent and utmost Latitude, by proposing the most engaging and forcible Motives to a serious Discharge of it, and by particularly cautioning them not to hearken to any contrary Suggestions, because they proceed from the grand Enemies of their Souls. (i. e. from THEMSELVES) who are ever endeavouring, with surprizing Art and unwearied Diligence, their everlasting Ruin. And can we suppose, that when God has threatened such eminent and flaming Vengeance to Liars, he would have contradicted his own sacred Threats, by signally favouring one of the most notorious of that Tribe, as Christ must have been, had he been an Impostor, and one who endeavours to deceive Men in their Religious, which are the most important of all their Concerns. But further, Actions are Interpreters of the Thoughts as well as Words, and therefore should one Man appeal to another for the Truth of what he says, and desire him, if he believe it, to certify his Belief by a certain Action; if he does it, when what he was appeal'd to about be false, he contracts the Guilt of

Lying

Lying, as much as if he had asserted it to him in plain and direct Words. Is it not then to make the God of Truth a Deceiver, and the Patron of Falsehood, to say, that when an Impostor appeal'd to him for the Truth of what was a most egregious Lye, and desir'd him to give his Testimony to it, by raising him from the dead at a certain determinate Hour, he reviv'd him at the appointed Time, and suffer'd him to put his Resurrection beyond Doubt by appearing openly and frequently during the Space of forty Days? And finally, if we consider that one of the Doctrines which *Jesus* taught Mankind was, that he should be the Just of the World, which is the peculiar Prerogative of God, and for another to claim it, is to invade one of the Rights of his Sovereignty. We shall be far enough from thinking that he would show any Favour to such a bold Pretender, we ought rather to suppose that he who is infinitely jealous of his Honour, would have commission'd some uncommon Judgment, to have seiz'd, and to have blasted the Man, who had risen to such a surprising Height of Impiety, as to arrogate to himself, that as a God, he should sit in the Seat of God, judging the World.

Secondly, IF Christ rose from the dead we may conclude, that God is propitious. For as he offer'd up himself a propitiatory Sacrifice, for the Sins of the World, God would never have rais'd him from the dead, if he had not been satisfied with his Oblation, nor exalted him at his own right Hand to supereminent Dignity and regal Authority. Hence St. Paul says, that *he was raised again for our Justification, Rom. iv. 24.* because his Resurrection assures our being justified upon

A SERMON

upon the Conditions of the new Covenant, as it is a Testimony of God's having accepted his Sufferings upon our Account; whereas if he had not risen, we could have had no rational Confidence towards God, or hope of his Favour.

Thirdly, THE Resurrection of Christ, is an Earnest of the Resurrection of all good Christians, to Honour and immortal Life, For while he was upon Earth he promis'd a happy and glorious Resurrection to all his true Disciples. Thus, John vi. 39, 40. *This is the Will of the Father who hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last Day. And this is the Will of him that sent me, that every one who seeth the Son, and believeth in him, may have everlasting Life, and I will raise him up again at the last Day.* And his Resurrection must be an Assurance to every true Believer that this Promise will be accomplish'd, as it is an Evidence of the Truth of his prophetick Mission and Authority, and of what he deliver'd to the World, as the Mind and Will of God. Besides, as his Resurrection from the dead was to kingly Power and Dignity, the Rule and Government of the whole World, under the Father; as he receiv'd there-upon the full Power of a King, both the Power of Legislation and of dispensing Rewards and Punishments to his obedient and rebellious Subjects respectively, we can't but suppose that he will readily and exactly fulfill that Promise which he made to his faithful Followers, in the Days of his Flesh, and consequently in the great Day of Retribution, make the Happiness of their whole Natures compleat, by reuniting their Bodies, glorified, resin'd and made incorruptible, to their pure, immaculate and happy Souls.

And

And *Finally*, As he dy'd to redeem good Men from that Death which enter'd into the World for *Adam's Sin*, by procuring for them the Resurrection of their Body to an everlasting happy Life; his Resurrection must be an Earnest of theirs, as it is an Evidence that his Death was an Acceptable Sacrifice to God. And this is what St. Paul directly teaches; *1 Cor. xiv. 20. 21, 22, 23.* But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first Fruits of them that sleep: That is, of all that have slept in him, for of such only is he declar'd to be the first Fruits, ver. 23. Far as by Man came Death, by Man came also the Resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all dye, so in Christ shall all be made alive. It seems probable to me that the Apostle here means, only all good Men, because he's only discoursing of the Resurrection of such in this Chapter, and from what immediately follows: But every Man in his own Order, Christ the first Fruits, afterwards, they that are Christ's, at his coming. Wherefore my beloved Brethren, (to conclude with the Words of the last Verse of this Chapter) be stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know, that your Labour is not in vain in the Lord.

F I N I S



Newly printed for JOHN CLARK.

A N Essay on Fundamentals, with a particu-
lar Regard to the Doctrine of the ever
blest Trinity: With an Appendix, concern-
ing the true Import of the Phrase, *Son of God*,
as it is apply'd to *Christ*. By the Reverend Mr.
JAMES FOSTER. Pr. 6 d.

Observations on sudden Death. Occasion'd
by the late frequent Instances of it, both in City
and Country. By the Reverend Mr. B. GROSVE-
NOR, Pr. 6 d.

Of Repentance and the Fruits meet for it: A
Sermon preach'd at the Charity School in Shakes-
pear's Walks, April 18th. 1720. By the Reverend
Mr. JABIZ EARLE. Pr. 4 d.

The Nature of Man. A Poem in three
Books. By Sr RICHARD BLACKMORE Knt.
M. D. Fellow of the College of Physicians. The
Second Edition. Pr. 1 s. 6 d.

Two Essays, 1. On the Liberty of the Will.
2. On Grace in its special Operations and Ef-
fects. By the late Reverend Mr. THOMAS
FRKE. Pr. 1 s.

A confirming Catechism, shewing the Rea-
sons of the Christian Religion, prepar'd for the
Use of adult Catechumens: By the Reverend
Mr. JOHN REYNOLDS. The fourth Edition.
Pr. 4 d. Or 3 s. 6 d. a Dozen.

In the Press

Several valuable Manuscripts, of the late Re-
verend and learned JOHN OWEN, D. D. Some
Time Vice Chancellor of Oxford, and Dean of
Christ's Church, never before publish'd. To
which will be added, All his Sermons that have
been already printed, together with several small
Tracts, very scarce; as also, some Memoirs of
his Life, and a Preface giving an Account of the
Whole. To which will be prefix'd his Effigies
finely engraven, by Mr. Vertue In One Vol. Fol.

s
-
e
d
-
e
o
e
ll
f
e
es
l.